



COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS FAMILY LAW TEAM

The Family Law Team at Bay Area Legal Services currently staffs two collaborative programs: FRANC and ChildNet (which is also partially staffed and was piloted in our Plant City branch office). Funding has been applied for to renew SafeNet.

FATHERS RESOURCE AND NETWORKING CENTER (FRANC)

FRANC is a family-strengthening program developed by the Child Abuse Council of Hillsborough County, Florida. It is a multi-functional service center that provides a hub for community-wide fatherhood initiatives, activities and programs. FRANC services are available to any father of infants and young children in Hillsborough County, regardless of educational background, family status or level of risk.

Bay Area Legal Services, Inc., (BALS) collaborates in this program by providing legal services that are pivotal in building a comprehensive and integrated system of care. BALS has developed an educational curriculum for fathers and provides legal information and written materials to the participants of the Fatherhood Resource Center. BALS has also contracted with the Child Abuse Council to provide up to 40 hours per year of legal advice and counseling to fathers accessing the center on issues of paternity and child support. Through legal education and assistance fathers can better achieve the goals of responsible parenting behavior, positive relationships with their children, family strengthening, and in cases where the family is no longer living together, shared parenting responsibilities with the mothers of their children. FRANC has been selected by Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood as one of two sites statewide to provide the "Equipping Fathers to Strengthen Families" program.

FAITH-BASED COLLABORATIVE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

Bay Area Legal Services, Inc., (BALS) was awarded a one-year Civil Legal Assistance grant from the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence in February of 2001, to provide family law services to domestic violence victims who are clients of faith-based organizations. Since domestic violence is now recognized throughout the community as one of the major causes of family breakdown, faith-based organizations have begun to work toward more permanent solutions to help their clients achieve stability. Rather than have clients repeatedly return for crisis services, they want to help them make lasting, positive changes in their families. BALS built a referral network for these new clients that includes The Spring of Tampa Bay, Inc., (domestic violence center), a long-time partner, and the following faith-based organizations in Tampa, Florida:

Catholic Charities, Metropolitan Ministries and the Salvation Army. Clients referred from the faith-based organizations receive family law legal services from BALS and guidance, counseling and referrals through their faith-based entity and The Spring. Our attorneys also work with the referring agency to assist clients in identifying and resolving legal issues in addition to their family law matters, to remove barriers that threaten family stability.

Another element of being underserved is focusing on only one issue. Besides the fact that a number of the clients from faith-based organizations may not have previously received domestic violence counseling or legal services, when they do apply for legal representation both the client and the attorney may initially address only the family law problem. However, most domestic violence victims have a variety of civil legal problems resulting from the breakdown of their families. For example, if the abuser has left the household they have lost an income. They may now be facing an eviction or foreclosure of their home, they may have difficulty obtaining food stamps, or they may need advice about credit issues. If they cannot maintain their independence while their family law case is pending, they may feel they have no alternative but to reconcile with their abuser. As the lead agency in the partnership BALS provides the project coordinator, who evaluates the client's need for other civil legal services and refers her or him to the appropriate team within our agency to receive advice and/or representation with housing, public benefits and consumer problems.

CHILDNET

ChildNet, founded by Bay Area Legal Services in 1995, is a holistic collaboration between Hillsborough County providers of services to domestic violence victims and their families. The goal of the project is to stabilize the family and turn them into survivors rather than continuing as victims. The collaborators provide legal services, intensive case management services and project evaluation as follows:

⇒ Bay Area Legal Services

provides full legal representation in obtaining domestic violence injunctions, divorces, and/or paternity actions, and in any other collateral legal problem arising out of the abuse.

⇒ The Spring of Tampa Bay

a nationally recognized domestic violence shelter which provides intensive case management services through its outreach center to clients best served in Tampa. Clients receive the full range of services offered by The Spring, including support groups for the victims and their children, employment services and transitional housing.

⇒ The Child Protection Team of Tampa General Hospital

provides its intensive case management services to the rural population served by Bay Area's Plant City office.

⇒ The Harrell Center for the Study of Domestic Violence

of the University of South Florida evaluates the test data collected by the case managers at the beginning of the case, after six months and at the completion of legal services. The test also

provides a useful tool to the case managers in assessing and appropriately addressing the goals of the clients, which sometimes change during the length of the case.

Case managers continue to work with the families up to six months after their legal cases are closed. All collaborators have contractual agreements with Bay Area Legal Services to provide services in the ChildNet Project. The collaborators meet quarterly while subcommittees meet regularly on different issues of interest to the victims and families. An exciting development is the creation of the Housing Initiative for Survivors of Domestic Violence (separate summary).

SAFENET

Collaborators:

- Bay Area Legal Services, Inc. (Lead Agency)
- The Spring of Tampa Bay, Inc. (Domestic Violence Center)
- Sunrise Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Center of Pasco County (Sunrise)
- James & Jennifer Harrell Center for the Study of Domestic Violence (University of South Florida)
- Mental Health Care, Inc. (MHC)

Since 1998, the SafeNet Program has been providing coordinated delivery of legal and social services to victims of domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault. SafeNet's comprehensive service delivery has been effective in helping to maximize the success of abuse victims in safely getting out and staying out of violent relationships. SafeNet attorneys advise victims, and represent them in seeking court orders for protective injunctions, divorce, child custody, support, visitation, and other related matters.

Case managers from our partner domestic violence agencies, The Spring of Tampa Bay and Sunrise of Pasco County, assess clients' greatest needs for social and economic services, and link them with appropriate local service providers. Social services include housing assistance, child-care, transportation, mental health counseling, education, health care, and other services which help victims stabilize their lives and become independent from their abusers. This stability in turn improves the positive outcomes in their court cases, and leads to their successful long term transition to abuse-free lives.

SafeNet also collaborates with Mental Health Care, Inc., which provides clinical case management and linkage to mental health services for clients and their children who have suffered severe emotional problems as a result of domestic violence. The Harrell Center collaborates by assessing client data to evaluate the effectiveness of SafeNet.

In addition to court representation, SafeNet attorneys provide regular legal education to groups of battered women, and individual counseling and advice. Our goal is to help each battered woman we assist to safely make the transition from *victim* of domestic violence to *survivor* of domestic violence.